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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that graduate schools should offer specific courses for future college reading specialists, as their problems and responsibilities differ from those of reading specialists in primary and secondary schools. As college reading is in need of more theoretical underpinnings, its practitioners need not only the facility for explaining a technique but also the understanding in some detail of how that technique is a complement to something basic in man's chemical or psychological nature. Furthermore, college reading instruction, to ensure its own future, has to develop a corpus of specialized training courses which recognize that college reading teachers are often not working in a classroom situation. The results of a recent survey of graduate programs in reading and of college reading specialists show that schools of education generally see no difference between teaching reading at various educational levels, whereas college reading specialists do see a difference. (TS)

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College Reading Specialists: Are they Being Short-Changed by Graduate Schools

by

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Professionals in primary and secondary reading have a body of advanced training, a theoretical background and an abundant supply of scholarly material that invigorates them. We in college reading are not so blessed, which is one of the reasons for this organization.

Administrators staffing college reading-Study Skills programs have been forced to tap an amorphous market. The market goes by various names: counseling, English, education to name just three. But there are many more smoke screens out there that college reading specialists have merged from. This diversity has had a salutary effect in helping to crystalize what it is that college reading wants to do and to lend it some initial legitimacy. But there is a concern, too, that this diversity adds up ultimately to a fragmentation that may be hard to defend. Our talents are becoming divided and spread to such an extent that 1) we have no organized, departmental, or regional leverage, and 2) that we will live for as long as our respective institutions need us.

It may not be quite so true in two-year colleges, but it is perfectly clear in four year schools that we in special programs, be they women's studies or study skills centers, operate on the fringe of academic respectability, too easily denied the possibility to merge into the main stream of the college's professional life. We operate on the out-skirts for reasons of which we are probably all aware. Most of those reasons center around the kind of student we traditionally are alleged to serve: remedial. Also true is that we are not a part of a traditional discipline.

Due to these things we are often isolated and forced into assuming different kinds of unflattering postures in order to gain the much needed recognition and support. Even those of us who have firm administrative commitment are vulnerable. While it may seem an odd place at first to look for the balm, I believe our collective hope lies first of all with this country's graduate schools. If this appears to be an effort to look elsewhere for one more thing on which to pin our hopes, it isn't quite that simple, for I see college reading programs making themselves less dispensable by attaching themselves to teacher training programs, if not ultimately assuming a large portion of the role in preparing teachers of college reading.

At this time many of us are products of Schools of Education that offered primary and secondary curiculae. These schools and state legislatures need to be encouraged to fund programs for college reading-study skills specialists. Part of the impetus is already there in the current drive for literacy. People are just beginning to be overwhelmed with the implication of 45 to 65 percent of freshmen at University of California campuses alone who fail literacy entrance exams. I believe that we can look to such situations to assist us in the formulation of graduate programs in college reading and study skills that would prepare teachers to most realistically combat growing student illiteracy.

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It is probably a mistake, however, not to exert our own combined influence. One way that I see the membership contributing is in accumulating courses for credit not only for its participating students but also aimed at college teacher preparation.

There are some immediate goals that could be challenged by this two way process:

1. As college reading is in need of more theoretical underpinnings, its practitioners need not only the facility for explaining a technique, but also the understanding in some detail of how that technique is a complement to something basic in man's chemical or psychological make-up.

2. College reading instruction has to solve an identity crisis that is summed up by the question asked by too many of our collegues, "You mean you teach speed reading?"

3. College reading instruction, for its own future, has to develop a corpus of specialized training courses that recognize that we are often as not standing before a classroom as in an individual instructional situation.

4. As faculty persons who compete for tenure and promotion, we need the support that ultimately removes us from the remedial to the normal. Federal and state resources that have supported inner-city programs in the past are drying up, and if there is to be a shift in emphasis, we need the training programs addressed to the normally progressing student. I do not mean to minimize the importance or usefulness of remedial instruction, but in universities which traditionally view themselves as catering to scholars and which are loathe to extend academic credit for remedial work (even in those instances when they do), proving that study skills-reading improvement is legitimate and not wholly remedial needs the curricular emphasis that a graduate school can provide.

These needs were borne out in a recent survey of graduate programs in reading and of college reading specialists coping with mundane problems of teaching Johnny to read properly now that he's 18. Reading teachers in all colleges and universities in the U.S. were contacted as to what they felt most valuable and what was lacking in their own training for their job. In other words, what preparation would have made their professional lives easier as they began their careers? At the same time, a similar survey was sent to <u>all</u> schools of education in the U.S. to discover how they were preparing college teachers of reading.

The return ratio on these two surveys was gratifying -- over 50%. The results were somewhat less than gratifying in terms of college reading instruction as a profession. Schools of education generally see no difference between this kind of instruction and teaching reading at the elementary or secondary levels. College reading specialists assume various negative attitudes.

Some typical comments from schools of education are these: "Our program in training reading specialists consists of Elementary through Adult under one." "We offer a Master's in reading which does not differentiate among levels." "Although we do not have a program specifically to prepare teachers of reading at the college level, approximately 50 of our graduates have become college level teachers of reading." "These courses do not seem to apply to the community college program." "One wonders whether methods or principles are so different

between college, secondary, remedial." "Program is small, but most of the doctoral graduates are now in college teaching despite lack of specific training." And from one university which claimed to have a training program for college reading specialists: "Our emphasis is on preparing reading consultants and specialists for state school systems and future faculty members for other departments of reading also emphasizing reading education for elementary secondary schools,"illustrating the self-perpetuating, vicious circle.

College reading teachers were far more vocal than schools of education. Several things stood out glaringly: 1) feelings of isolation, apology for their profession, desperation for more information, and 2) the fact that virtually all -- with few exceptions -- taught within the same state where they earned their highest degree.

Perhaps this latter point seems unimportant, but consider for a moment the mobility and resulting cross-fertilization of ideas and resultant professionalism within virtually all other disciplines. By comparison, we college reading specialists are incestuous in our professionalism. Instead of cross-fertilization, we largely maintain the status-quo in college reading. Only those of us who make herculean efforts to visit other campuses (in other states as well as nearby), to attend and participate in conferences, and the like, manage to gain new ideas and to grow professionally. And even in this we are thwarted, because the literature is sparce, and WCRA, a relatively small and regional organization, is one of too few organizations catering to college reading specialists's needs.

All of this is reflected in comments from college reading specialists. Typical among them are these: "I hesitate to claim the name specialist." "I gained much knowledge in the above areas through experience rather than in specific graduate courses." "As noted by all of the "3's" the college training program is lacking in the area of Community College. I received excellent training for high school and elementary school but have had to make the applications my self or in conference with my advisor." "In our area it is next to impossible to get courses in college reading. I am interested in these classes when available." "There is a definite need for programs for the college level." "If you have information or lists of sources of information, I'd greatly appreciate it if you'd share them with me." "I am officially an elementary reading specialist who, through independent work has adapted to college level requirements." "I am unacquainted with your program but the inventory has stimulated my interest. Do you have books or pamplets which pertain to such things as developmental reading on a college level? Please send me any information you can." "Anything that I have learned about college reading was gained in seminar class in which I could choose my own project or from college teaching experience." "It is very unfortunate that University Graduate schools (at least those I surveyed before enrolling) are so ill-informed or unwilling to admit that reading is taught other places besides the elementary school classroom." "Oh, to have such courses as the above included in the M.Ed. in Reading!"

In terms of the survey questions, 28 responding (N=245) universities claim to have a program specifically for training college teachers of reading. Of these, 14 claim to offer ½ or more of the 22 courses suggested as meaningful to the college reading specialist. An additional 14 universities say they plan such a program in the future. Eight of those plan to offer ½ or more of the suggested curriculum. Only 28%, or 8 universities, now offer a course relating to the psychology of college reading, while 56% of college reading

specialists replying (N=750)wished they had been offered such a course. Twenty-one percent, or 6 schools of education, offer training in teaching reading to bidialectal, bilingual or culturally disadvantaged college students. Fifty-seven percent of college reading specialists wished for training in bilingual/bidialectal training and 61% desired training in teaching reading to culturally disadvantaged students. Another large gap existed in training for dealing with paraprofessionals. Seventeen percent, or 5 universities, offer such training, while 57% of practitioners desired it. Out of approximately 445 schools of education in the U.S., approximately 42 offer or plan to offer within the next few years a program to professionalize college reading teachers.

I think the need is obvious. While education courses are certainly no panacea, certainly they can lend the underpinnings of theory and practice afforded other areas of teaching and at the same time add professionalism to the field. Futhermore, with greater professionalism, college reading can move toward greater mobility of teachers and resulting cross fertilization of ideas, rather than as so often happens, relying primarily on part-time graduate T.A.'s and faculty wives. On-the-job training is fine for a clerk, a waitress, or a cashier. Teaching reading in a college or university should be something more than that -- and in fact <u>is</u>, as we all know. We must demand our due from graduate schools where we get our professional training.

RESPONDING UNIVERSITIES OFFERING GRADUATE WORK IN COLLEGE READING (N=245)

1. University of Southern Missippi
2. West Virginia University
3. University of Alabama
4. Temple University
5. University of Nevada
6. The American University
7. University of Colorado
8. West Illinois University
9. Oregon State University
10. University of Oregon
11. Florida State University
12. Southern Connecticut State College
13. University of Wyoming
14. West Washington State College
15. University of Tennessee
16. University of Missouri, Kansas City
17. University of Oklahoma
18. University of Illinois
19. Texas Christian University
20. University of Virginia
21. Southern Illinois University
22. Kentucky State University
23. Colorado State University

UNIVERSITIES PLANNING FUTURE PROGRAMS

1. University of Pittsburgh ---------- 1975-76
2. City University of New York ---------- being developed
3. University of Wisconsin ---------- may offer in future
4. Northwestern University ---------- 1975-76
5. University of Scranton ---------- 1977-78
6. Chicago State University ---------- 1975-76
7. University of Northern Alabama ---------- 1977-78
8. Illinois State University ---------- 1976-77
9. Southern Illinois University ---------- 1975-76
10. Bowling Green State University ---------- 1978-79
11. University of Washington ---------- 1975-76
12. Brooklyn College ---------- 1977-78
13. Creighton University ---------- 1977-78
14. Shippenburg State College ---------- 1975-76
15. Stanford ---------- "limited" "unofficial" program
16. University of Maine at Orano ---------- maybe in future
17. University of Kansas ---------- 1977-78